

Anarchist Political School

# **Internationalism, Imperialism, and National Liberation**

**To Arms!**

---

**Capitalists, Parsons, Politicians,  
Landlords, Newspaper Editors and  
Other Stay-At-Home Patriots.**

---

**your country needs  
YOU  
in the trenches!!**

---

**WORKERS**

**Follow your Masters**

---

# **Anarchist Political School**

Modules in this series:

MODULE 1: Class, Capitalism, and the State

MODULE 2: Reform or Revolution?

MODULE 3: Anarchism and Organisation

MODULE 4: Anarchism and the Trade Unions

MODULE 5: Fighting Oppressions of Gender and Sexuality

MODULE 6: Racism, Colonisation, and Indigenous Struggle

MODULE 7: Internationalism, Imperialism and National Liberation

MODULE 8: The Environmental Crisis

MODULE 9: The Russian Revolution

MODULE 10: The Spanish Revolution

**The Anarchist Political School is a project of the Anarchist Communist Federation. For more information, check out our website [ancomfed.org](http://ancomfed.org)**



## **Internationalism**

The crises which capitalism generates can't be solved within a single country. Capitalists threatened in any given part of the world can send their business elsewhere. The global market can strangle the economy of any single group of people who attempt to act against the interests of the global ruling class.

International militaries and intelligence agencies will reliably unite against rebellious populations and revolutionary upheavals. The proliferation of nuclear weapons holds humanity hostage to the insane policy of 'mutual assured destruction'. Most urgently of all, we share the same rapidly warming climate.

The problems of global poverty, environmental destruction, and endless war can be solved. However, as long as we live in capitalism, we find ourselves caught in a system of competing states, each dominated by the interests of a domestic ruling class. The ruling class of each country is driven to compete with its rivals in the struggle to accumulate wealth.

What is needed is working class organisation—not just within our own country, but across *all* countries.

Anarchists are internationalists. The working class is strongest when it can co-operate to counter the global power of capitalists and the market. Anarchists

recognise that an isolated revolution will either be crushed or inevitably compromised by the effort to survive in a hostile capitalist world. If workers in other countries don't rise up in support of a revolution, revolutionaries face the choice of retreat or accommodating themselves to dealing with capitalists and engaging in the world market.

Defeating capitalism and the state must be a global process. A successful revolution will need to spread to encompass the whole world. To do this, we need to fight against imperialism and nationalism and unite the workers of the world on the basis of class solidarity.

Discuss

*How can anarchists organise today to ensure that an initial revolution in one country spreads into others?*

## **Capitalism and Imperialism**

**Imperialism** is the extension of a state's power across borders for the purposes of domination and exploitation by the ruling class. In the conflicts between modern states, nationalistic narratives and moral arguments are invented by all sides, justifying policies of intervention, war, and exploitation.

The internal dynamic of capitalism drives it towards expansion. Capitalist firms are driven to produce more and sell more, in pursuit of ever greater profits, or face being overtaken and destroyed by faster growing and more profitable businesses.

Each capitalist state broadly acts in the interests of their capitalists, whilst also competing with other capitalist states who are doing the same. Ultimately, there are only so many resources available within the borders of any state, and only so many buyers within the national market. For a system based on endless accumulation and growth, this poses serious problems.

Capitalism's solution, from its very beginning, was conquest, plunder, and colonisation. From the 17th century through to the present, capitalist states have sought to:

1. Capture new markets by destroying Indigenous industries and forcing captured populations to buy their goods;
2. Plunder resources by forcing captured populations to produce input for capitalism, such as cotton, rather than necessities for themselves, like food;
3. Exploit ever more labour by enslaving colonised people.

Capitalism has also made the arms industry a highly profitable one. Weapons manufacturers and governments see the continual growth of this industry as necessary—not only for the profits of the capitalists, but to militarily compete with rival states. Consequently, the interest of the ruling classes in militarisation and war endlessly expands, to the point of mutual assured destruction.

We are regularly told that a good government fights for a shared ‘national interest’, but the interests of workers and bosses are entirely different. The capitalists control the wealth of a country, and governments need capitalism to be healthy in the country they govern. As a result, the ‘national interest’ is, and must always be, the interest of the ruling class.

Discuss

*The United States is the World’s dominant imperial power. Should we support states that challenge the United States? Why or why not?*

## **From Colonialism to World War I**

The history of Western imperialism is a record of brutality at unparalleled scale. The wealth of Western Europe and the United States rests on genocidal colonisation in the Americas, Africa, and parts of Asia.

**Colonialism** was a project of the ruling classes; a scramble to carve up 'ownership' of the world in order to accumulate the necessary land, resources, and markets demanded by the emerging capitalist system. Europe's main competitor in this regard was Japan, which claimed East Asia as its sphere of influence, laying the basis for its place among the world's leading economic and military powers.

The systemic imperatives which led to colonisation continued to drive the militarism of the 20th century. Liberal historians now struggle to explain the cause of a murderous catastrophe like World War I. Attempts to blame either the Germans, Russians, or French as uniquely evil or blameworthy have largely fallen out of favour. Instead, we get confused stories about an assassination of an Austrian Archduke quickly spiralling out of control, and a web of prior alliances forcing states to honour their pledges and join the war.

Anarchists instead argue that World War I was the product of competing blocs of capital inevitably colliding with one another; each attempting to reach beyond their national boundaries to satisfy the ruling classes' need for growing profits and a greater share of the global market.

The international working class had no interest in the fight but were sold nationalist myths about the need for

patriotic unity against barbaric enemies. Prior to the war, the radical workers' movement seemed to hold an internationalist perspective. In each country, it was agreed that any declaration of war should be opposed through strikes, insurrection, and ultimately revolution.

In one of the great tragedies of world history, this pact was not honoured. Having spent years fighting for power within national parliaments, most of the world's socialist parties sided with their national ruling classes and endorsed the war. Even some anarchists (thinking it was preferable that certain states win out over others) betrayed their principles. Internationalism and revolutionary action were sacrificed, and workers were sent to massacre one another, for the benefit of the bosses.

Discuss

*Why do you think socialist parties abandoned internationalism and supported the war?*

## **World War II**

World War II can also be understood as being the result of failed revolutions in a period of capitalist crisis. In Germany, fascism emerged out of the failure of the German Revolution. A government of reformist socialists used a far-right militia to crush a revolutionary

movement of workers' councils. Ultimately, it was fascism which best served the interests of the German ruling class. Hitler's rise was facilitated by capitalists in order to crush Germany's militant unions, modernise industry, and project Germany's political and economic power throughout Europe.

In Italy too, ruling class fear of revolution led to fascism. Mussolini's rise was spurred by the 'two red years'—a revolutionary period of factory occupations and land seizures, which anarchists played a leading role in. The movement was opposed by the Socialist Party and violently repressed.

Japan, meanwhile, found itself in an economic crisis, exacerbated by restrictive US trade policy—itsself a response to rising Japanese competition. This accelerated the desire to establish an expanded influence throughout Asia and to strengthen the fight against communist forces which threatened Japan's position as an emerging global power.

With the end of the war, the US emerged as the clear winner. The country had been largely unharmed, had been revitalised by the development of a military-command economy, and was in control of roughly half the world's wealth. The ruined economies of Europe and Asia provided resources, labour, and markets—they were to be rebuilt as workshops in the interests of

American capitalism. Aid was conditioned on keeping communist parties out of government and fascist collaborators were granted positions of power. In the decades following the war, dictatorships were installed or supported across the 'third world' by the US to ensure access to valuable raw materials, labour markets, and to suppress popular revolutions which might threaten to break up the US-run world system.

Discuss

*What wars do we see in the world today? What has caused them, and what role does imperialism play in perpetuating them?*

### **The Cold War and 'Socialist' Foreign Policy**

In Eastern Europe after World War II, the Soviet Union played a similar imperialist game. But whereas the West argued that whatever operation it carried out was for the purposes of fighting 'Soviet tyranny', the Soviets constantly claimed to be 'spreading revolution', 'fighting the CIA', or suppressing 'fascist uprisings'.

Both narratives can, in some instances, claim germs of truth. The Soviet Union sometimes supported rebel groups fighting US-backed regimes, just as enemies of the United States do today. The US, meanwhile, routinely attempts to influence legitimate uprisings

against enemy governments or provoke them where they don't exist.

The Cold War was a conflict between two competing ruling classes seeking to weaken the other and to install within their spheres of influence friendly and economically compliant regimes. It would be a mistake to think of the Cold War as simply a battle between two states, let alone a struggle between capitalism and communism. The ideology of the Cold War was a pretext for any imperialist adventure that the ruling classes demanded.

For anarchists, both Cold War blocs were enemies of the working class. Both the liberal West and the so-called 'communist' East were equally willing to violently suppress militant working-class organisations, controlled by the rank and file.

Wherever revolutionary workers threatened the political and economic interests of the Soviet bureaucracy, they were fought. In China, the nationalists were supported against the Communists. In Spain, Stalin demanded that the Communist Party crush the revolution and ally itself with capitalism. When workers rose up and formed workers' councils in Hungary (1956) or tried to revolt in Czechoslovakia (1968), the Soviet Union brutally invaded.

Even in Cuba—itself a victim of imperialism—diplomatic and economic relations with fascist Spain triumphed over consistent solidarity with the international working class. Castro’s government cosied up to Francisco Franco’s regime and even mandated three days of mourning upon his death in 1975.

Discuss

*Is it possible for a state to genuinely support international working-class movements, or does state power inevitably conflict with that goal?*

### **Is Australia Imperialist?**

From Vietnam to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Australia has assisted the United States in almost every war that the US has declared. Many on the Left argue that this is because Australia is an unwilling puppet of the US and so a victim of imperialism itself.

However, this interpretation doesn’t match up with the facts. When Australia joins the US in its imperialist wars or supports regimes like the one in Israel, it is because this is in the *independent interests* of Australian capitalism. Australia is an imperialist power—a minor one—but still imperialist. Our ruling class seeks to dominate the Pacific and parts of Southeast Asia,

projecting power through its role as an enthusiastic junior partner in a US-led alliance.

For instance, Australia supported General Suharto's murderous anti-communist dictatorship in Indonesia, not only because this was good for the US dominated world-system, but because it allowed Australia to directly exploit Timor Leste's oil when Indonesia invaded in 1975. When unrest in Indonesia ultimately overthrew the dictatorship in 1998, Australia was in a position to maintain an imperialist influence over Timor Leste.

Discuss

*Why does Australia support the US-led imperialist alliance as opposed to pursuing its own independent foreign policy?*

## **National Liberation Movements**

In their fight against imperialist aggression, colonial rule, and regimes of racial domination, movements against national oppression commonly unite people around 'nationhood' and call for new independent states.

Anarchists are opposed to both states and the politics of nationalism, but this doesn't mean that we oppose struggles against national oppression.

Anarchists reject all efforts to use struggles against domination as a means for establishing new governments and ruling classes. Both capitalists and workers of a 'nation' might suffer under foreign occupation or be racially discriminated against, but beyond this they have nothing in common. No working class, of any national group, can truly be free if it limits itself to only ending these forms of domination. In fact, even the struggle against foreign domination cannot be completed without struggling against capitalism itself. A successful national liberation struggle will still leave the power of foreign capitalists in place.

Anarchists are internationalists. We oppose all forms of domination and exploitation. Racial domination and imperialist wars aren't just horrific injustices in themselves, but also barriers to international working-class unity. This means that anarchists are always in favour of defeating imperialist aggression, fighting colonial dispossession, and overthrowing apartheid.

Where anarchists differ from others in our support for struggles against national oppression is that we insist on sticking to our anarchist strategy and programme. We argue that movements against national oppression should be based on class unity, rather than national unity.

To prevent the current rulers being replaced by Indigenous or nationalist 'leaders', struggles against national oppression must unite workers in organisations under their own control. These organisations must stand against class enemies within the nation, just as they stand against those dominating and exploiting them from outside of it. Neither independence in India nor the end of apartheid in South Africa have freed the workers of those countries.

In some cases, as in Palestine today, solidarity will not come easily from the working class of a colonial power or invading state. We insist that building such solidarity is necessary in the long term. However, this solidarity can't just be wished into existence today. In the short term, we believe that the struggle will be stronger the more it draws on the example set by the First Intifada, when Palestinians rejected their so-called leaders, and instead formed democratic committees to carry out the insurrection. In Australia, we need rank-and-file networks in the unions that can shut off electricity, water, and communications to Pine Gap and ban all work on war materials bound for Israel.

Discuss

*What happens when a national liberation struggle replaces the old ruling class with a new one?*

## No War but Class War

Working class people have the right to defend themselves. But when it comes to war, anarchists say that no war is really worth fighting but the class war. A position which does not change purely because one state invades another. We oppose war production. We encourage desertion, draft resistance, selective sabotage, and diversion of war material to the revolutionary movement. We encourage working class soldiers to transform national struggles into class struggle, to fraternise with so-called 'enemy' soldiers, and to direct their fight against the officers, governments, and bosses on all sides of a military conflict.

Ultimately, to end war once and for all, and to effectively respond to the other crises which capitalism forces upon us today, the workers of the world need to unite.

Discuss

*If another state were to invade Australia today, how should anarchists react? What actions should we take?*